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SUBJECT: GUTIERREZ TAKES REINS ON GALAPAGOS

REF: QUITO 0440

1. Summary. President Gutierrez convoked a March 4 meeting with donors and other political players in the Galapagos (Reftel). Gutierrez struck a surprisingly balanced tone in his remarks, calling for a sustainable solution to the Galapagos crisis that provides economic alternatives to local fishermen while protecting the unique environment there. He dispatched his newly minted Minister of the Environment to come up with a plan in 30 days for dealing with the crisis (Septel). The Ambassador followed up with President Gutierrez on March 7, reiterating the work the USG has done in the Galapagos and supporting the President's 30-day initiative. End Summary.

President Convenes Meeting in Galapagos

2. President Gutierrez, in order to show his concern for the Galapagos, convoked a meeting of donors (Reftel) that was to coincide with his general cabinet meeting in the Galapagos on March 4. Events leading up to the meeting led donor representatives to believe that the proposed meeting was meant to be more dog-and-pony than nut-and-bolts.

3. First, the agenda for the donors' meeting was changed at the last minute to include representatives from the fishing sector.

4. Second, on the flight to the Galapagos (Quito players traveled on the Presidential plane), diputado Vinicio Andrade circulated to donor representatives a copy of his proposal to establish a USD \$3 million fund to help fishermen move into other income-generating alternatives. He said he would present this proposal at the donor (now to include fishermen) meeting for Gutierrez and the Presidents of the fishing cooperatives to sign. While the proposal was good in theory, it lacked detail and we requested that Andrade not present it until we could fully review it. For whatever reason (more likely President Gutierrez had sticker shock), he acceded and the proposal was not presented for signature.

5. Third, the night before our meeting, a huge political rally was held on San Cristobal. Approximately five hundred people attended (roughly 10 percent of San Cristobal's population) and the tone was definitely pro-fishing. Minister Camacho spoke passionately at the meeting and called for Diputado Andrade to continue fighting for the fishermen - an interesting comment for one charged with overseeing environmental matters.

6. Despite the events indicating a one-sided meeting aimed at castigating donors and mollifying fishermen, President Gutierrez was remarkably balanced as he presided over the meeting.

7. The Presidents of the four fishing cooperatives in the Galapagos all gave impassioned speeches to the President calling on him to support them and their efforts to make a living. Specifically, they called upon President Gutierrez to support long-line fishing in the Galapagos and presented proposals for projects to support this and other fishing-related activities. They denounced the GNP and Charles Darwin Foundation as corrupt institutions and derided conservationists for focusing only on animals. At one point, a fishing cooperative President even accused the Spanish Ambassador of being a meddling foreigner, confusing him with the often outspoken director of WildAid in the Galapagos. The fishing representatives also pointed out that the tourism sector also shares responsibility for damaging the biodiversity of the Galapagos.

8. Rene Mauricio Valdes, Director of the UNDP in Ecuador, spoke on behalf of the donor community and gave a very pointed, measured and thorough response. He highlighted the three concerns donors have in the Galapagos) GNP instability, the need for alternatives to fishing, and the problem of illegal immigration) and called upon the GOE to take urgent action. He clearly noted that the crisis in the Galapagos was Ecuador's responsibility and that the donor community stood by to assist. However, continued involvement by the donor community, he added, would require clear, positive and constructive commitment by the GOE, free of political interference. (This has been our consistent message to the GOE on the Galapagos.)

19. President Gutierrez gave a remarkably balanced and statesmanlike response. His response focused on alternatives to fishing, but he commented that the Galapagos problem required a sustainable solution, taking into account the needs of all the parties and the long-term requirements of the islands. President Gutierrez then instructed Minister Camacho to meet with the donors the following week and to immediately begin working on a 30-day plan to formulate viable, sustainable solutions to the Galapagos problems.

Ambassador Follows Up

10. The Ambassador discussed the Galapagos with President Gutierrez at a March 7 meeting. The President started by lamenting the plight of the fishermen who he claimed have not received any benefit from the millions of dollars channeled into the Galapagos through NGOs. The Ambassador pointed out that the USG has in fact funded many small development projects) e.g., a marmalade factory, equipment to smoke fish and package it for sale to tourists) and that there were recently emergency medical response exercises in the Galapagos. Gutierrez conceded that there have been socio-economic projects, but he said that we needed to better publicize our efforts. Perhaps, the Ambassador noted, but nonetheless we have contributed to the socio-economic development of the islands.

11. President Gutierrez ended his Galapagos discussion reiterating that a viable, sustainable long-term solution was needed. He told the Ambassador that he had instructed his new Minister of the Environment to come up with a plan in 30 days for dealing with the Galapagos crisis. She applauded his initiative and offered assistance in formulating the plan.

The 30-Day Plan

12. The DCM and USAID Director paid a courtesy call on Juan Carlos Camacho, the new Minister of the Environment (Septel). The donor community will also begin a series of meetings with Camacho to begin formulating the 30-day plan. We will take advantage of Gutierrez's call for action to press Camacho to depoliticize the GNP Director's position, formulate truly viable alternatives for fishermen (not just long-line fishing), and to start focusing on illegal immigration to the Galapagos.

Comment

13. We are encouraged by Gutierrez's new efforts to put Galapagos policy back on track, after a long period of self-acknowledged presidential neglect and political expedience. The president's emphasis on sustainability is important, and could help shift the political debate towards consensus. In concert with other donors, we will continue our efforts to educate and work with the new Environment Minister to promote stability in the park leadership and new opportunities for fishermen.

KENNEY